

**SPOKANE FARM BILL FORUM TESTIMONY 11-03-05**

**MR MIKE JOHANNNS, Secretary of Agriculture**

Dear Mr. Secretary

I am Bob Playfair, a farmer, from Chewelah and want to thank you for coming to Eastern Washington with this hearing. I am the past President of Washington Farm Forestry Association and currently serve as the western regional Vice president of the National Woodland Owners Association.

My comments this afternoon are to re-emphasize the importance of maintaining the recognition that our forest products from family owned lands continue to be considered an Agricultural crop for the purpose of Conservation titles and other USDA funded payment programs in the 2007 Farm Bill. This can only be accomplished, as in the past, by referencing and continuing the forestry sections found in the current Farm bill.

Twenty years ago I retired from being a Conservationist with the BIA and returned to the family farm to catch up with the 25 years of neglect from no active management while I was seeking an off farm income sufficient to raise my family. A 10-year ACP LTA allowed and encouraged my sister and I to address our forest health problems. We had rampant root rots patches that needed species conversion, overstocked stands to be thinned and major brush patches that had not reforested after the 1910 fires requiring mechanical and chemical brush control and seedling planting.

This direct cost share assistance coupled with the technical advice from the SCS, Extension and State Stewardship Foresters, all funded by the existing USDA programs, enabled us to jump-start an active forest management program. Along with hay and pasture sales, the farm now produces an annual forest income from a healthy, fire safe landscape enjoyed by all who drive by dodging the deer, turkeys and elk now enjoying the vegetative changes.

In the current issue of the AUDUBON magazine Jerry Goodbody's article (p51) on the "Billion acres of Ag lands" located between the public's ownership and back yards as being a key piece of the country's conservation puzzle. He refers to these "working lands" as crop, range and pasture lands leaving out the family working forests that are part of a high percentage of today's farms and ranches. They are key in most wildlife habitat enhancement projects and a high percentage of the clean water and air originate in our forests. Maybe they are not recognized as crops because the rotation is 20 years or longer but a large amount of Biomass (sequestered carbon) can be harvested periodically with little or no soil disturbance.

Having just returned from a NWOA board meeting on two tree farms in New Hampshire, I still marvel at the endurance and fortitude of our ancestors that settled New England. There are rock fences every where in their forests. That is because eighty percent of the land was cleared of forests and cultivated prior to 1900. Today most of that farmland has been returned to tree covered hillsides so the logs, chipwood, maple syrup and wildlife are coming from "prior farmed" lands that should still be considered AG crops and land.

The same thing has been happening in eastern Washington and Northern Idaho. Our family has returned some of the farmlands we cut hay and grain from in the 1950's to growing trees. We will harvest our first crop of small saw log thinnings from these new forests next year. That is the reason I believe our family forest lands need to continue being classified as Ag lands by Congress and not mixed up or confused with public and industrial timberlands.

As the aging present owners of many larger farms die and they are sold and subdivided by heirs who either cannot afford the taxes or have no desire to accept non-spendable asset values. When sold, these farm and forest lands become smaller parcels and the new owners do not have the knowledge or desire to actively manage their backyard forest.

ENTIRETY OF THE  
ACCORDING TO THE  
11/19/01 10:00 AM

That is until a catastrophic event like the recent hurricanes, a wild fire or ice storm jerks them into the world of reality that a forest is dynamic and requires daily TLC. Then they are looking for a logger to "salvage their investment dollars to pay the cleanup cost. These new owners are the ones that now desperately need the assistance of an extension agent or other public funded forester. It is with this in mind I request you help us retain the historic funding titles and appropriations in both the Farm Bill and Forest Service [ McEntire-Stennis (state and private) and RREA] funding.

Thanks again for coming and if I can be of any assistance in the future, please don't hesitate to ask.



Bob Playfair  
Rafter Seven Ranch  
PO Box 1399  
Chewelah, WA 99109

[Upthecreektreefarm@inwi.net](mailto:Upthecreektreefarm@inwi.net)

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE  
SECRETARIAT, USDA

2005 NOV 10 P 12:17

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY  
SUBJECT: [Illegible]  
[Illegible text follows]

Very truly yours,  
[Illegible Signature]

[Illegible Stamp]